

What do Will Smith and Vladimir Putin have in Common?

At least half the people who read this Op-Ed will say: “Whataya, crazy, man? They have nothing in common!” The other half will say: “Well, I get it, although it is a bit far-fetched.”

In current culture, the two have more in common than one might initially believe.

Will Smith’s real name is Willard Carroll “Will” Smith II. He was born in West Philadelphia, the son of a Philadelphia school board administrator and a refrigeration engineer. Smith attended a Catholic elementary school in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, his parents separated when he was 13, although they did not divorce until years later.

Will Smith attended the well-known Overbrook High School. Smith was the subject of an Internal Revenue Service action, which assessed him \$2.8 million in tax debt. Many of his possessions were taken, and his income was garnished.

Will Smith did not have a particularly violent background, but he learned early the power of stardom and he mixed with a crowd of other successful entertainers.

Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, was born in Leningrad, Russia in 1952. Putin’s mother was a factory worker, and his father was a conscript in the Soviet Navy. Putin’s father was severely wounded, and his two brothers died. Vladimir Putin studied law and eventually made his way into the KGB. It is hard to know precisely what Putin’s curriculum vitae looks like, but clearly he had the training of a secret operative within the Soviet Union. Early in life, Vladimir Putin learned how to manipulate others and acquire power within a structure familiar to controlling figures like his predecessors, Joseph Stalin and the Czars.

In terms of their life story, Putin and Smith could not be any more different. What makes the men similar is their belief that they are entitled to power. They understand how to use power, and, where necessary, they permit their respective tempers to lead them into violence.

Vladimir Putin is, as President Biden recently said, a “butcher” and someone who does not deserve leadership. Will Smith, on the other hand, is a creature of Hollywood and the inescapable conclusion that his success entitles him to control the conduct of others.

What is perhaps most interesting about both men are those who are supportive of their actions. There are a contingent of Americans and others who believe that Russia has a right to control its former satellite states, those on its borders, just like the United States has a certain amount of control over Canada and Mexico. Russia seeks a puppet regime in Ukraine, allegedly as insulation against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The truth is that Vladimir Putin seeks to intimidate through the use of murder and to acquire control as an exercise of his demonic nature to lord power over others.

Will Smith is simply a punk Hollywood actor, who believes that his success and fame entitle him to punch out anyone who he finds annoying or even mildly degrading. Imagine what would have happened to the great comedians of the past, like Groucho Marx, Rodney Dangerfield and George Carlin, if it was okay to slap their faces when they insulted others.

An oddity in this world of contradictions are those in both the Republican and Democrat Party who criticize Joe Biden for finally uttering the truth; that Putin is a real bad guy and does not deserve to remain as Head of State. Joe Biden was absolutely correct when he said that he is not walking back anything. Good for you, Joe! Oddly, Democrats are too timid to applaud Joe, and Republicans hate to heap any praise on an opponent. The truth is that President Biden showed a Reagan-esque moment that should be supported broadly by the American people, both Republican and Democrat. Joe Biden is not about to punch anyone out, but he is speaking a moral truth that should be easily embraced by Americans.

Will Smith, likewise, is hard for the Hollywood elite to criticize, because violence is not unique in the culture to which Hollywood appeals. All one has to do is listen to rap music. Recently, I took a tour of some of the rap artists and I was blown away by how bad it was. It is racist, misogynous, anti-Semitic, and the list goes on. Rap music is perhaps one of the best examples of how inner-city violence is exported to American culture in general. The worst elements in society become role models for our kids.

The world has a problem with violence, obviously. We in America cannot control the Vladimir Putins of the world, but we can condemn the Will Smiths, take away their Oscars and give them a good, swift boot in the butt. There needs to be some very specific action taken against Will Smith; not to ruin his career, but to make sure that he understands that what he did was wrong. He should be required to meet with ghetto kids and talk to them about what he did, why it was wrong and why they should not do the same thing. He needs to meet face-to-face with Chris Rock, shake his hand, apologize, and ask for forgiveness. Will Smith needs to do something concrete that would send a message as to why he is not a Vladimir Putin, but rather is a man who is deserving of all the accolades that he has received in life and may acquire in the future. Will Smith has an opportunity to turn his bad behavior into a teaching moment. Vladimir Putin has no such opportunity.

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